

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

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R 110900Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY SANA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7332

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SANA 0477

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: MASS, YE

SUBJECT: SOVIET ARMS FOR YEMEN

REF: STATE 023964

SUMMARY: DISCUSSED US TRAINING, ARMS SUPPLY WITH
YAR CHIEF OF STAFF AHMED AL-GHASHMI WHO VOLUNTEERED
THAT SOVIETS, AT LAST MINUTE, BACKED OFF DELIVERING
MIG-21'S AND T-54 TANKS TO YAR LATE LAST MONTH.

1. CHARGE AND DATT MET FEBRUARY 10 WITH AHMED AL-
GHASHMI, YAR CHIEF OF STAFF, TO DISCUSS PROSPECTIVE
TRAINING, PER REFTEL. SEE SEPTTEL FOR DETAILS.

2. CHARGE SAID WE MOVING TO PLAN TRAINING IN
CONNECTION WITH DETAILED LIST OF EQUIPMENT WHICH
SAUDIS HAD INDICATED THEY PROPOSED TO BUY FOR
YARG.

3. GHASHMI WAS VISIBLY ELATED. EYE PRESSED FOR
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DETAILS, BUT WE CONFINED OURSELVES TO GENERAL

DESCRIPTION MEETING IN RIYADH AND SAUDI DESIRE FOR RAPID MOVEMENT. WE SAID SAUDI LISTS WERE IMPRESSIVE PROFESSIONAL DOCUMENTS WHICH WOULD ALLOW DRAMATIC AND SYSTEMATIC MODERNIZATION OF YEMENI FORCES. SAID UP TO YEMENIS AND SAUDIS TO WORK OUT CRUCIAL QUESTIONS OF DELIVERY, NUMBER, TYPE, SUPPLY, ETC. BUT THATSISG WORKING NOW TO RESPOND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO SAUDI QUESTIONS ABOUT PRICE AND AVAILABILITY.

4. GHASHMI, VERY ENTHUSIASTICALLY, REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT WHATEVER SAUDIS WANTED WAS ACCEPTABLE TO HIM AND TO YEMENIS AS GROUP. HE CLAIMED, HOWEVER, THAT SO FAR SAUDISHAD DISCUSSED ONLY GENERAL PRINCIPLES WITH YARG OFFICIALS, FOR INSTANCE, PURCHASE OF USG, FRENCH

AND BRITISH RPT BRITISH EQUIPMENT. SOVIETS, MEANWHILE, WERE MAKING DELIVERIES.

5. GHASHMI THEN SAID THAT SOVIET EQUIPMENT WAS "TRIVIAL" AND DID NOT INCLUDE MIG-21'S HE HAD TOLD US ABOUT. HE SAID MIGS WERE ON SHIP WHICH HAD DOCKED IN HODEIDA, HE SAID, AND THERE WERE ALSO T-54 TANKS IN THE HOLDS. HE HAD SEEN TANKS WITH HIS OWN EYES. HOWEVER, HE SAID, SOVIETS REFUSED AT LAST MOMENT TO UNLOAD THEM BECAUSE OF SAUDI MILITARY MISSION WHICH VISITED YAR IN WEEK BEFORE SOVIET SHIP ARRIVED. HE WAS CATEGORIC THAT SOVIETS, NOT YARG, HAD REJECTED EQUIPMENT, BUT HE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HE WAS DELIGHTED AND SOVIETS WERE VERY DISCONCERTED. (IN AN ASIDE, HE THEN POINTED OUT THAT SUBSEQUENTLY, AS DATT HAD OBSERVED, HE HAD CONSPICUOUSLY AND GRATUITOUSLY SNUBBED HIGH RANKING SOVIET OBSERVERS AT YARG MANEUVERS WHILE SEEKING OUR WESTERN AND MODERATE ARABS FOR GREETINGS.)

6. HE SAID SHIP HAD BEEN PUT INTO ANCHORAGE OFF HODEIDA FOR SEVERAL DAYS, THEN REMOVED TO ADEN FOR OFF LOADING.

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7. HE SAID THAT YEMENI PILOTS WHO PREVIOUSLY HAD GONE TO SOVIET UNION FOR TRAINING HAD BEEN SHIFTED TO MIG-21 TRAINING, BUT THAT AT THIS POINT NO RPT NO TIME WAS SET FOR DELIVERY OF AIRCRAFT THEMSELVES. HE SAID MORE SOVIET SHIPMENTS WERE ON WAY BUT CONTAINED "NOTHING NEW".

8. HE REPEATED REQUEST SEVERAL TIMES THAT WE SHOULD

GET DELIVERIES IN GEAR TO RESPOND TO SOVIETS.
CHARGE SAID WE MIGHT NOT RPT NOT BE ABLE TO MATCH
SOVIETS IN SPEED OF DELIVERY, BUT WE WERE DEPENDABLE
FRIENDS WHO WOULD BE COUNTED ON TO PROVIDE MILITARY
ASSISTANCE WITHOUT POLITICAL STRINGS. GHASHMI SAID
QUICKLY HE PREFERRED MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING
FOR CASH RATHER THAN IN EXCHANGE FOR PRINCIPLES.
HE SAID THT YEMENI OFFICERS WHO WENT TO SOVIET UNION
GOT SAME INDOCTRINATION THAT SOVIET OFFICERS DID,
AND POSED A THREAT TO GOVERNMENT UPON THEIR RETURN.
IN THIS CONNECTION, CHARGE ASKED IF SOVIET MILITARY
MISSION WASN'T INCREASING IN NUMBER AND ACTIVITIES.
NO, SAID GHASHMI. ONLY REPLACEMENTS ARE ARRIVING,
AND THEIRROLE IS NOT GROWING. YEMENIS WANT WESTERN
EQUIPMENT, SAID GHASHMI FIRMLY (AS HE HAS SAID
MANY TIMES BEFORE), TO BE ABLE TO GET RID OF SOVIETS.

9. COMMENT: WE DON'T REALLY DOUBT THAT GHASHMI
DISLIKES SOVIETS. GHASHMI HAS GONE OUT OF HIS WAY
TOO MANY TIMES, (BOTH IN PRINT AND IN CONSPICUOUS
OCCASIONS LIKE THE MANEUVERS HE MENTIONED)
TO INSULT THEM. AT SAME MANEUVERS, HOWEVER,
HAMDI WAS CAREFUL SHAKE SOVIET HANDS AND SMILE
AT SOVIET FACES. CONSISTENT WITH MAN IN THE MIDDLE
ROLE HE PROBABLY TELLS SOVIETS IN PRIVATE NOT RPT
NOT TO MIND GHASHMI.

10. QUESTION OF WHO IS TELLING TRUTH IS STILL OPEN.
HAMDI SAID NO RPT NO MIG-21'S WERE ON WAY, THAT
THEY (LIKE NEW TANKS) WERE PART OF UNSIGNED SECOND
STAGE OF DEAL WITH SOVIETS. GHASHMI TOLD US TWICE
TANKS AND MIG'S WERE COMING, BUT JORDANIAN AMBASSADOR
INSISTS THAT GHASHMI STUCK TO HAMDI LINE IN DEALING
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WITH HIM. GHASHMI NOW SAYS MIG CRATES WE SAW ON SOVIET
ARMS CARRIER WERE INTENDED FOR YEMEN, AND THAT
SHIP CARRIED T-54'S IN HOLD. IF TRUE, QUESTION IS
WHY THESE ITEMS WERE NOT RPT NOT OFF LOADED.
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11. WE ARE GUESSING, BUT WE THINK YEMENIS AGREED TO NEW DELIVERIES AT DEPTH THEIR CRISIS LAST WINTER WITH SAUDIS. THEY CLEARLY LIED TO US THEN, SAYING THERE WAS NO DEAL, NOT EVEN ANY EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO MAKE DEAL. SOVIETS CRANKED UP, GOT EQUIPMENT ON WAY. FOR VARIETY OF REASONS, IT HAD TO GO AROUND CAPE, NOT THROUGH SUEZ CANAL. BY TIME IT ARRIVED, HAMDI HAD SETTLED DIFFERENCES WITH SAUDIS, AND EITHER HE OR SOVIETS MAY THEN HAVE DECIDED NOT TO CARRY THROUGH WITH DELIVERIES --AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT. HAMDI WOULD NOT NECESSARILY TAKE GHASHMI INTO CONFIDENCE ON THIS MATTER, AND SOVIETS CERTAINLY WOULDN'T. WE THINK, IN ANY CASE, GHASHMI WAS TELLING USTRUTH AS HE KNEW IT WHEN HE SAID MIG'S WERE ENROUTE TO YEMEN. WE THINK HE IS TELLING TRUTH WHEN HE SAYS HE IS DELIGHTED THEY WERE NOT OFF-LOADED. WE BELIEVE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE DELIVERY STILL OPEN (VIDE PILOTS IN TRAINING) BUT DATE NOT RPT NOT SET.

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12. WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT SAUDI ROLE IN THIS WAS. THEY MAY HAVE STRONG ARMED (OR SWEETALKED, WHICH WOULD WORK MUCH MORE EASILY) YEEMENIS INTO REFUSING DELIVERY. IN THIS CONECTION, WE WERE SURPRISED

BY THASHMI'S STATEMENT THAT HE KNOWS NO RPT NO DETAILS
OF WHAT SAUDIS INTEND. SAUDI MILATT HERE HAS SHED
NO LIGHT ON THESE MATTERS. IN ANY CASE, IT SEEMS
CLEAR THAT SOVIETS HAVE STUMBLERD OR BEEN PARTLY
CHECKED.

13. WE SHOULD PERHAPS RAISE THIS WITH SAUDIS IN
CONNECTION WITH FORTHCOMING TRIP OF SULTAN--IN
MID-MARCH--TO YAR. THIS WOULD BE IDEAL OPPORTUNITY
SIGN SOME INITIAL LOA'S AND SET OUT FUTURE PROGRAM
IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE. WITH SOVIET DELIVERIES
UNDERWAY, WE NEED SIGNS OF MOVEMENT ON OUR PART.
IT WOULD REQUIRE CONSIDERABLE EFFORT ON OUR PART, AS WELL
AS CLOSE COORDINATION WITH SAUDIS, , BUT IT WOULD SEND CLEAR SIGNAL
OUR INTENTIONS AT TIME WHEN SOVIET ROLE
HAS UNEXPECTEDLY AND HAPPILY BECOME
UNCERTAIN AGAIN.
RANSOM

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